

letter to an MPP

General Delivery, Moose Factory
23 March 1993 P0L 1W0

Dear Mr. MPP,

Here, in summary, are some key points about Mr. H's death:

1. In 1985 George Thomson and a panel of 5 doctors recommended that the Ministry of Health take steps to address attitude problems in the health community. The report named Public Health as the Ministry of Health vehicle to increase awareness about sensitivities being a real problem affecting an increasing number of patients, and that it was "clearly untenable" to say that sensitivities could be dismissed as "all the patients are emotionally ill".
2. In 1986 I was told, by the mandated Public Health advisor within the Ministry of Health, that the problems were not real, but psychologically induced.
3. In 1988 or 1989, the Public Health Unit in Timmins advised H's family that these problems were not real physically based problems, but were psychosomatic. His family began to put pressure on him to change his perception of his own experience.
4. COMSOC Minister John Sweeney assured us, in 1986, that he "administered services" to the environmentally sensitive. Despite dozens of requests, he apparently did not ensure that COMSOC offices knew the policy, even when informed of suicides of people who had been frustrated in their efforts to receive benefits.
5. In 1989, a medical adjudicator who never examined H, told COMSOC that his illness was "thought to be psychological". H was turned down for benefits. Sweeney's office was told of H's high level of frustration, and reminded of previous suicides where COMSOC applicants had been dismissed as emotionally ill.
6. At some point during the spring of 1989, Julie Zurakowski, of the Ottawa COMSOC office, checked with COMSOC in Toronto (in regards to another case) to see if there was a

policy regarding the environmentally sensitive. She said "there is no policy".

7. On June 3rd, 1989, H went upstairs to his room in the family home, stuck a shoe under the door, and shot himself.
8. The family experienced considerable trauma, with serious repercussions, after H's death due to their having been on his back (at the advice of the public health unit and others).
9. Dr. Ross Bennet, the Chief Coroner of Ontario, wrote to COMSOC and two other Ministries in connection with policies and attitudes facing the environmentally sensitive. There was no response until several months later when the letter was leaked to the Globe and Mail (by myself). After Christie MacLaren did a couple of stories, COMSOC issued a memo to all income maintenance staff "to remind" them of a policy concerning the environmentally sensitive that had existed "since 1983". The current Chief Coroner, Dr. James Young says he has not received any concrete assurance that attitude problems have been dealt with.
10. There were rumours of an internal investigation a few months later, but there was never any report back to the self-help groups, or any acknowledgement that attitudes in officialdom were such that they were contributing to suicides.

Your interest is appreciated. I hope you can bring justice in connection with H's death. We do not want to see heads roll, but there remain attitude problems in the Ministry of Health (Dr. Richard Schabas, 327-7392), in many Regional Health Units, in COMSOC, in the health care community, and in the community at large.

Some situations which have existed in this province, and which almost certainly currently exist, could be properly called atrocities.

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